

Leading Change

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Chris is a very good manager with a long tenure at The Club. Chris is well liked by the Board, staff, members, and community. Under Chris, The Club's planning is constant and inclusive. Meticulous budgeting ensures that the club meets its financial goals every year. Staffing levels are always appropriate, with just the right amount of HR participation, allowing problems to be identified and solved with great efficiency. The Club has long been considered the premiere club of the area, and interest in The Club has been sufficiently strong that, for the past decade, there has always been a waiting list of prospective members. Dues are reasonable and commensurate with the quality of The Club.

However, Chris has begun to sense a change in the air. Recently, the membership waiting list has dwindled to only a handful of names, and several prospective members, when approached with a membership offer, have passed on the opportunity to join The Club. Participation at The Club's membership events become less enthusiastic. The Club's financial statement isn't quite as impressive as in years past. Chris realizes that The Club is losing some of its strength.

Now, Chris's task is to alert the Board of Directors to these warning signs without causing turmoil - or losing a very good job.

The challenge faced by Chris is frequently experienced by managers across the club industry. Clubs just aren't what they used to be. Today, in order to guarantee a club's long-term success and viability, it is necessary that GMs not only be managers, but leaders as well. A manager is responsible for all the fundamental tasks that keep a club operational on a day-to-day basis: planning, budgeting, staffing, organizing, operational problem solving. According to John Kotter in *Leading Change*, "A leader, on the other hand, is concerned with the future: a leader's job is to define a vision of future progress, align people with that vision, and inspire them to make it a reality." In order for Chris to forestall the looming problems that face The Club and rejuvenate its flagging fortunes, Chris must take steps to establish leadership, securing the confidence and cooperation of The Club's Board and its membership.

First, Chris must alert the BOD that there is a need for change. However, Chris should frame these concerns carefully: Chris's desire is to galvanize constructive action, not cause panic. Rather than making a formal address to the entire BOD, Chris should introduce the topic in an informal manner, perhaps during a casual lunch with The Club's president. During the conversation, Chris can mention some soft spots in membership, and ask the president for his own take on these soft spots. This will allow Chris an opportunity to articulate some concerns, convince the president of their legitimacy, and hear the president's own ideas about potential solutions. If the president proves receptive to Chris's approach, Chris can then suggest that the president and the treasurer meet together with Chris to discuss these matters further. In this manner, Chris can build a coalition of support in a gentle, efficient manner.

In order for Chris's leadership to be effective, Chris must define the relevant issues and create a proportional sense of urgency. Chris must also create the support necessary to implement

solutions, so that changes can be made in an organized, methodical manner. Involving the president and the treasurer at an early stage allows Chris to ensure that the BOD participates in the change process. Chris can then win over each of the other BOD members individually, preferably through frequent one-on-one discussions characterized by clear, persuasive communication. If Chris conducts these dialogues successfully, members of the BOD will soon begin having conversations among themselves, creating an atmosphere for potential change.

Informing the BOD of The Club's problems and winning their support for a solution should not, however, be the final phase of Chris's strategy. In order to guarantee the best chance of success, Chris must also secure their full participation in the development and implementation of new changes. According to Harvard professor J. Richard Hackman in *Collaborative Intelligence*, in order to coordinate various levels of expertise, the BOD must be explicitly encouraged to form itself into teams, which can develop task-appropriate strategies for meeting the identified challenges. As a leader, Chris must ensure that these teams maintain a pragmatic focus on their tasks, agreeing on substantive solutions to The Club's "soft spots" and not merely deferring to emotion, sentiment, or habit. Chris's role as the general manager makes monitoring the BOD's progress a delicate task, but it is critical to the best practices of team success. Chris must either find ways to encourage the BOD, or enlist the help of other members in doing so.

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